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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the experience of Seattle (Washington), this paper attempts to determine why school districts across the country have recently sought to de-emphasize segregation. Concerns about the validity of pursuing integration, particularly through busing, have been present throughout the history of school desegregation, but only recently is there a substantial withdrawal from mandatory integration policies. Following an introduction, Section II provides the contextual features of the study, and Section III discusses overarching issues of policy. Even though the federal courts and federal agencies played a large role in fashioning and enforcing this policy until the 1980s, there are wide variations in the implementation of the principles of Brown v. Board of Education, depending on local conditions and the local federal judge. Therefore, the Seattle case, considered in Section IV, illuminates the role that local dynamics play in desegregation policy. The most important factors in the recent retreat from integration are discussed in Section V, and the paper concludes in Section VI with speculations about the future of school equity policies and a consideration of the degree to which the country is returning to the era of separate but equal facilities. Recent court decisions, especially the conservative bent of the present Supreme Court, political mood, differing opinions among African Americans, and possible a general impatience with the time and money integration has cost, are all considered as possible factors in the trend away from busing. (Contains 4 figures, 5 tables, and 51 references.) (SLD)

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Priority Shift:
The Fate of Mandatory Busing for School Desegregation in Seattle and the Nation

Laura Kohn

March 1996

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I. Introduction

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme court declared in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." This unanimous decision was momentous, not only for its impact on schools, but also because it facilitated a series of legislative and judicial actions that dismantled America's version of apartheid. Few Americans today would favor a return to the era of compulsory "separate but equal" facilities for nonwhites. Most people recognize in principle the value of diversity in America and the importance of honoring the declaration that "all men are created equal" by expanding its meaning to include women and people of color. In a 1994 Gallup poll, 87 percent of Americans said that they approve of the outcome of *Brown* "...that all children, no matter what their race, must be allowed to go to the same schools," up from 63 percent in 1961 and 52 percent in 1954 (McAneny and Saad, 1994). Despite these areas of apparent philosophical consensus about desegregation[1], the country is in the midst of a partial retreat from the schooling-related policies that emerged from the *Brown* ruling.

From the moment the *Brown* decision was handed down, communities have grappled with the scope of the constitutional requirement for desegregated public schools. Even today, although there is overwhelming agreement that desegregation precludes compelling students of different races to attend separate schools, there is no consensus about whether school districts have a further obligation to integrate students of different races and ethnicities in schools and classrooms. In communities with racially segregated housing patterns (and there are many such communities in America), if students were assigned to the school closest to home, schools would tend to have racially homogenous student populations. School integration in these communities necessarily requires that some students ride buses to schools outside their

[1]In this paper, the term "desegregation" will be used with its seemingly most common meaning, which is the elimination of policies and practices that discriminate against or separate students on the basis of race. The term "integration" will be used as a type of desegregation policy, in which students of different races are encouraged or required to attend the same school.

neighborhood. Given this circumstance, controversy surrounds the question of the extent of the public obligation to create integrated classrooms: at what cost must we integrate?

After fourteen years of silence on this question after the *Brown* decisions, the Supreme Court in the late sixties and early seventies provided some guidance. The ideal of integration was not explicit in the original *Brown* decisions, in which the Court emphasized the elimination of racial discrimination from policy decisions. This interpretation of *Brown* led to the establishment of "freedom of choice" policies in many districts, which did not substantially eliminate single-race schools since few blacks and virtually no whites chose to attend schools that were traditionally identified with the other race. Subsequently, starting with *Green v. County School Board* in 1968, the Supreme Court affirmed a shift in focus from purity of decision process to achievement of integrated results, "...albeit on the theory that achieving results was the only acceptable evidence that the process had been purified." (Gunther, 1985)

In 1971 in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, the Supreme Court stated explicitly that difficulty of the remedy did not excuse school districts from striving for school integration if they had violated the constitutional rights of students. Chief Justice Burger explains in the majority opinion,

> All things being equal, with no history of discrimination, it might well be desirable to assign pupils to schools nearest their homes. But all things are not equal in a system that has been deliberately constructed and maintained to enforce racial segregation. The remedy for such segregation may be administratively awkward, inconvenient, and even bizarre in some situations and may impose burdens on some; but all awkwardness and inconvenience cannot be avoided in the interim period when remedial adjustments are being made to eliminate the dual school systems. (402 U.S. 1 (1971))

This was the logic used by the court to permit mandatory busing programs for desegregation purposes. Essentially, *Green* and Swann told school districts, "You must integrate at *any* cost, if you have violated the constitution." Over the next decade or so, hundreds of school districts adopted, under court order or under threat of court order, integration busing programs.

Forty-two years have passed since *Brown*, and a quarter century has gone by since *Brown*'s intent was clarified in *Green* and *Swann*. The optimism with which those decisions were sought and celebrated by a broad coalition of white liberals and African Americans has faded. The voices of dissent that were previously dismissed as racist or reactionary now come

from all sides and all levels of our democracy. After twenty-five years of mandatory busing for desegregation, this public policy has lost its base of support and is slowly being withdrawn district by district across the country, with Seattle poised to be next. Mandatory busing will probably remain a useful tool for desegregation in some districts long into the future, especially in suburbs like Cheltenham Township north of Philadelphia, which just began a desegregation busing program this month, but its popularity nationwide is fading.

This paper seeks to address the question, "Why now?" Why is it that during the past few years, and during the past year in particular, school districts across the country have sought to de-emphasize integration as a strategy of desegregation? Concerns about the validity of pursuing integration have been present throughout desegregation's history, yet only now are we witnessing a substantial withdrawal from mandatory integration policies.

Not surprisingly, many factors have contributed to this trend. These factors will be drawn out and illustrated first from a national overview of the desegregation debate, then by exploring the specific case of Seattle. The national perspective provides the contextual features (Section II) and overarching issues of the policy (Section III). Desegregation, however, is ultimately a local issue. Even though the federal courts and federal agencies played a large role in fashioning and enforcing this policy until the eighties, there are wide variations in the implementation of the *Brown* principles, depending on local conditions and the local federal judge, as well as state laws and regulations. Therefore, the Seattle case (Section IV) illuminates the local dynamics that play a large role in the making and unmaking of desegregation policy. Following both the national and Seattle discussions, the most important factors in the recent retreat from integration will be summarized in Section V. The paper will conclude in Section VI with speculations about the future of school equity policies and a consideration of the degree to which we are returning to the era of "separate but equal" schooling.

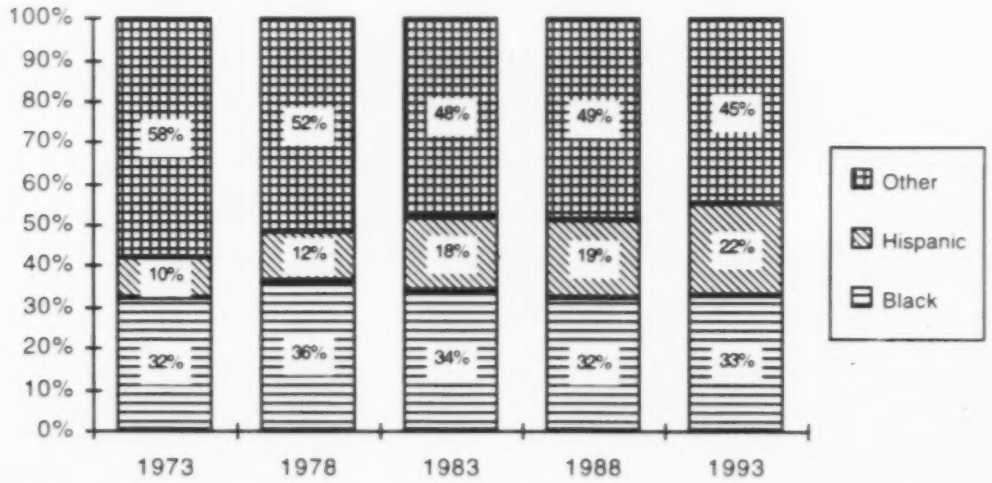
II. The Desegregation Policy Context

In advance of tackling the substantive issues around desegregation in the sections that follow, the topics covered in this section will frame the discussion. Four major topics will be addressed: changes in urban demographics, recent public opinion data about desegregation and integration, relevant recent Supreme Court decisions, and trends in racial isolation. All of these topics provide contextual information about the environment in which desegregation policies are currently being debated.

New Urban Demographics

American cities experienced substantial demographic shifts during the forty-two years following the *Brown* decision. The most important change relative to desegregation policy is the growth in the proportion of urban public school students who are not white. This is shown in Figure 1 below. The figure shows that this country experienced a fifty percent rise in the proportion of Hispanic/Latino students in the late seventies and early eighties, from 12 percent of urban public school students to 18 percent. African American students have comprised about a third of urban public school students for the past twenty years (or more). Since the

Figure 1: Ethnic Distribution of Public School Students in Central Cities, Grades 1-12, 1973-1993



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1995.

"other" category in Figure 1 contains both Asian students, whose numbers have also been rising, and white students (as well as other ethnicities), it is apparent that at least since the late seventies, "minority" students have comprised the majority of urban students. In fact, some urban districts, like Washington, DC, Detroit, and Atlanta, are now more than eighty percent African American, and several others, like Los Angeles, are multi-racial but have very small white populations. Because of substantial immigration to cities like L.A. from Asia and Central and South America, desegregation is no longer a black/white issue in many cases; it is now a multi-cultural challenge requiring attention to a diversity of educational values and needs.

Until the Supreme Court's decision in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974 - "Milliken I"), civil rights activists hoped that in school districts in which "minorities" comprised the majority of students, desegregation would be achieved by forcing city districts to consolidate with suburban districts (so-called metropolitan solutions). The Supreme Court ruled, however, that such consolidations could not be required if the suburban districts were not themselves illegally segregated and were not responsible for the urban districts' racial isolation. In numerous predominantly "minority" school districts nationwide, integration is simply not an option. Some of these districts receive court mandated state subsidies for compensatory programs, due to a subsequent Supreme Court ruling in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1977 - "Milliken II"), which allows federal courts to require such funds in districts that are affected by *de jure* segregation but that cannot realistically be integrated. It should be noted that, even if many urban districts cannot be integrated, integration is still a realistic possibility for the vast majority of school systems in the nation.

As will be seen in Section IV in the Seattle case, desegregation policies are often blamed for the decrease in the proportion of white students in urban systems, because people believe that whites have moved to the suburbs or placed their children in private schools in order to avoid sending them to integrated public schools; this phenomenon is known as "white flight." In reality, urban demographics have shifted for many reasons, one of which may be desegregation. Other factors include the construction of freeways, the related growth of

suburbs, and increases in crime rates in cities, all of which encouraged middle class families to leave. It is difficult to single out desegregation's effect on this larger societal trend.

Public Opinion

A close analysis of 1994 national polling data reveals Americans' ambivalence about desegregation; this finding is strongly indicative of desegregation's political status. In anticipation of the fortieth anniversary of the *Brown* decision, Gallup conducted a poll of American whites and blacks to gauge their views on desegregation (all data from McAneny and Saad, 1994). In response to general questions about desegregation and integration, a majority of respondents supported the policies and felt they were beneficial for race relations and black education. Furthermore, approval of the policies has improved substantially over the years. It was already noted in the introduction that overall approval of the *Brown* decision is quite high, at 87 percent; among blacks, the endorsement was even stronger at 94 percent. Sixty-four percent of respondents felt that school integration (defined in the poll as "bringing black and white children together into the same schools") has improved relations between blacks and whites, up from 40 percent in 1970. When asked whether school integration has improved the quality of education received by blacks, 65 percent agreed that it had, up from 43 percent in 1971 and 55 percent as recently as 1988. In response to the parallel question of whether the quality of education received by whites has improved due to integration, the races differed significantly: 59 percent of blacks said education had improved for whites while only 39 percent of whites agreed.

Despite Americans' mostly positive and improving perceptions of desegregation and integration as general concepts, support for specific integration implementation policies, especially mandatory integration, is weak. Respondents were asked, "Which do you think is the better way to help minority students--Step up efforts to integrate white students with minority students in the public schools or increase funding and other resources for minority schools." Only 32 percent favored more integration, while 48 percent preferred more funding for minorities. Blacks felt even more strongly about this preference, although there was some discrepancy across age groupings, as shown in Table 1 on the next page. Blacks as a group,

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and young blacks in particular, favored resources as a way to help black students. But blacks over age 50, most of whom probably attended segregated schools, favor more integration over more resources. This difference could be due to their experience in segregated schools, or alternatively it could reflect older blacks' stronger dedication to the traditional goals of the civil rights movement.

Table 1: Public Opinion Regarding Integration versus Resources

Race	Push Integration	More Minority Funding
White	33%	47%
Black	25%	60%
Black, Age 18-49	17%	73%
Black, Age 50+	43%	31%

Source: McAneny and Saad, 1994.

Americans also expressed a preference for voluntary integration over mandatory measures. Respondents were asked, "In your view, which of the following is better--Letting students go the local school in their community, even if it means that most of the students would be the same race, or transferring students to other schools to create more integration, even if it means that some students would have to travel out of their communities to go to school?" Overall, 85 percent favored the local option versus 12 percent supporting mandatory transfer. Blacks also expressed this preference, but less strongly: 64 percent picked the local option, while 33 percent favored mandatory transfer programs. College educated blacks were evenly split on this question, while those with no college experience favored the local option by 72 percent to 25 percent. This level-of-education difference was insignificant in the overall sample.

These data reveal an important disjunction between people's idealistic beliefs in the benefits of integration and their willingness to support it as implemented policy. Since some whites indicated a belief that blacks benefit from integration more than whites, their responses on the implementation questions could be read as expressions of selfishness ("Why bother since I don't get anything out of it?"), but on the whole, blacks favored alternatives to mandatory integration as well. Another pessimistic but plausible explanation for the high

ratings on the goals of desegregation is that since many whites have now moved to the suburbs, urban desegregation no longer threatens them:

> ...the greater acceptance of desegregation that we witness today may also stem from the belief that *within-district* desegregation no longer has any real consequences for white America. Since most black students are confined to urban school districts, within-district desegregation now has little impact on predominantly white suburbs. (Bates, 1990)

The author later notes that middle-class blacks have also gained the capacity to choose alternatives like suburbs or private schools, which may make advocacy of desegregation less complicated for them as well.

Recent Supreme Court Decisions

Three Supreme Court decisions about desegregation during the nineties have facilitated the national decline of busing for desegregation by promoting school districts' release from court supervision. In *Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell* in 1991, the Court established standards for determining when a school district should be released from court oversight: "It reasoned that because desegregation orders were not meant to operate in perpetuity, it was necessary to consider whether or not a district has complied in good faith with the decree and whether or not the vestiges of past discrimination had been eliminated to the extent practicable." (Russo, Harris, and Sandidge, 1994) The wording guides situations in which demographics make it impossible to integrate all schools. Thus even if a school district's past discrimination contributed to the demographics, it can still regain its autonomy. Oklahoma City was released from court oversight as a result of this decision.

A year later, the Court ruled in *Freeman v. Pitts* that a school district could regain control over areas of its operations that could be shown to be free of discrimination, even while other areas of operations (which might include student assignment, teacher assignment, and facilities maintenance) remained under oversight. This decision underscored the emphasis on maintaining or returning local control when and where possible. Finally, last year in the long-standing *Missouri v. Jenkins* case, the Supreme Court overturned district and circuit court rulings that required the state to pay for massive subsidies to the Kansas City school district. The objective of the desegregation efforts in this case, as defined by the district court, was

equalized test scores across races; the majority opinion suggested that this was too stringent a standard. The lower court was encouraged to extricate itself as soon as *Dowell* standards were met.

With these three decisions, the Supreme Court intentionally set a course of disengagement between the federal courts and local school districts. Several school districts subsequently obtained releases from desegregation court orders, including Denver and Wilmington, Delaware, and many others are now seeking such rulings. Not every school district is in a hurry to end desegregation-related court supervision, however, since many such rulings result in court-mandated extra funding from the state, as in the Kansas City case (in which the state, not the school district, sued for an end to the court order).

Increases in Racial Isolation

For all the effort and political angst that Americans have invested in school integration efforts over the past quarter century, the results in terms of decreasing racial isolation (the concentration of black and Latino/Hispanic students in majority minority schools) are meager. Around the time of the Supreme Court's first busing decision, *Swann*, in the early seventies, substantial progress was made in reducing the proportion of African American students attending predominantly "minority" schools. This progress stemmed from a convergence of events that disposed school districts to try desegregation out of compulsion or guilt, including the *Swann* decision and subsequent lower court rulings, federal agency efforts and regulations in support of desegregation, race riots in many cities, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. A study conducted by Gary Orfield in 1993 revealed that since that time, the data on racial isolation for blacks have been quite stable (or possibly deteriorating recently), as can be seen in Table 2 (Orfield, 1994). The situation for Latinos is quite different, since their isolation steadily rose throughout the seventies and eighties.

Of course, given the demographic data reviewed earlier, it is quite likely that these figures would be increasing even more dramatically without integration policies. But the deterioration of this indicator of national school integration is probably also a reflection of

desegregation's mixed political status in the years since Richard Nixon made anti-busing one of his Presidential campaign issues. Orfield believes that the recent increase in the percent of

Table 2: Percent of U.S. Black and Latino Students in Greater Than 50 Percent Minority and Greater Than 90 Percent Minority Schools, 1968-1991

	> 50% Minority		> 90% Minority	
Year	Blacks	Latinos	Blacks	Latinos
1968-69	76.6	54.8	64.3	23.1
1972-73	63.6	56.6	38.7	23.3
1980-81	62.9	68.1	33.2	28.8
1986-87	63.3	71.5	32.5	32.2
1991-92	66.0	73.4	33.9	34.0

Source: Orfield, 1994.

black students in minority-majority schools, from 63.3 percent in 86-87 to 66 percent in 91-92, reflects the change in political commitment to desegregation that is the topic of this paper. Indeed, as will be demonstrated in the Seattle case in Section IV, some Americans of all races are comfortable with these trends toward racial separation, particularly, as revealed in the Gallup poll, if the alternative to the current course is mandatory busing.

Implicit in the collection and presentation of these racial isolation data is a value placed on the mixing of students of color with whites in schools, not just a mixing of cultures. A review of the integration objectives in the next section will reveal the rationale underlying this preference and the belief of integration advocates that America should continue to invest resources and effort to ensure this outcome.

III. Integration Policy Objectives and Effects

In light of the demographic trends, public distaste for mandatory busing, and recent Supreme Court decisions reviewed in the previous section, it is perhaps not surprising that school districts like Seattle are considering scaling back integration efforts. It is worthwhile to recall, however, the reasons that integration policies were originally sought by civil rights leaders, and the reasons that many people continue to support integration policies passionately. In the past the cause of school integration had a moral clarity to it; school segregation was so patently wrong that people convinced themselves that eliminating it would be the key to interracial equality in America (Wilkins, 1995; Neuborne, 1995) We have since learned through hard experience that, in addition to the harms to African Americans, "more than three centuries of racial subordination had shaped much of American institutional behavior as well as the personal psychology of vast numbers of white people." (Wilkins, 1995) Today, many people continue to fight for school integration in the belief that it is a necessary component of racial justice in America, even if it is not alone sufficient. The polling data in support of desegregation reviewed above suggest that most Americans agree, in principle. Their objectives for the policy will be reviewed in the first part of this section. In the second part, empirical research about the effects of integration policies relative to the objectives will be briefly surveyed. Research reveals that although integration has fallen short of society's expansive goals, it nonetheless has had a positive impact on interracial equality in this country.

Integration Policy Objectives

The arguments for integration expanded over time, particularly during the sixties. The additional objectives may have emerged to justify such a massive social policy or to accommodate researchers' measurement capabilities, or they may have been simply a product of the supreme optimism that some Americans had at that time for the power of civil rights to fix all that ailed us. In the model of policy making formulated by John Kingdon, integration can be thought of as a policy "garbage can" into which we tossed all of our racial problems (Kingdon, 1995). Whatever the reasons, Americans became extremely ambitious for

integration policies, hoping that they would: (1) eliminate the stigma of attending segregated schools, (2) equalize resources and educational opportunities, (3) equalize outcomes, (4) facilitate access to the mainstream economic power structure, and (5) promote racial harmony and an integrated society. All of these objectives (and more) were prominent by the late sixties (c.f. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1967), and remain central to pro-integrationists' arguments today. They are described in more detail below:

(1) Eliminate the stigma of attending segregated schools - This was a primary concern of the Supreme Court in the original *Brown* decision: "To separate [children of color] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to be undone." (347 U.S. 483, 1954) Note that the Court was concerned with the perception of stigma on the part of those who were discriminated against, and the impact of that perception on self-esteem. The other type of stigma that integrationists hope to remedy is a popular (and, in many school districts, accurate) perception that racially isolated "minority" schools are inferior educationally, since this bias could impair unfairly the chances for job placement or college acceptance for students from such schools.

(2) Equalize resources and access to educational opportunities - This is the original and fundamental goal of the *Brown* litigators. The separate public schools that African Americans attended in 1954 were obviously inferior to the white schools in terms of buildings, books, and facilities, and integration appeared to be the only way to ensure fair distribution of these resources: "Most people assumed that these disparities would be eliminated only if black families were given access to schools that had been all white, schools that in 1954 appeared to be far superior to those grudgingly offered to black families by white legislators and policy makers." (Bates, 1990)

The apparent necessity for integration to ensure equity of resources was embedded in an even higher ambition, which is articulated by a strategist from the *Brown* legal team, Robert Carter: "[W]e believed the surest way for minority children to obtain their constitutional right to equal educational opportunity was to require the removal of all racial barriers in the public

school system, with black and white children attending the same schools, intermingled in the same classrooms, and together exposed to the same educational offerings." (Carter, 1995)

(3) Equalize outcomes - Even though the *Brown* decision did not explicitly target outcomes, it has been assumed ever since by some observers and some federal judges that this was an implicit goal of the policy. The presumption is that if we truly equalize educational opportunities, equalized achievement will follow. Contrary to the accusation made by many African American desegregation opponents today, the theoretical mechanism of this improvement is not as simplistic as the notion that improved learning for students of color results from their "sitting next to white children, as if the magic dust of white superiority rubbed off in integrated classrooms and sifted onto black children, imbuing them with an ability to overcome their innate limitations. *Brown*, of course, did not rest on such ridiculous notions." (Shaw, 1996) This proximity conception is a restatement of theories of the "lateral transmission of academic values," which suggest that sharing a classroom with students with high academic aspirations will raise the aspirations of low achieving students. This theory, though plausible, is unsubstantiated (Hawley, 1992), and other conceptions of why integration should improve academic outcomes have been developed.

Most researchers focus on the higher resources and higher average socio-economic status that are present in most integrated schools relative to schools with predominantly students of color (Orfield, 1994). Higher resources should translate into better teacher quality, better facilities, and better learning materials, all of which presumably facilitate learning. Higher average socioeconomic status (SES) usually correlates with higher average student achievement, which may affect teacher attitudes and practice: "SES affects achievement through teachers' expectations for most students that are shaped by the performance of their higher achieving students." (Hawley, 1992) The effectiveness of this mechanism is predicated on the assumption that integrated schools contain integrated classrooms, which is often not the case, as will be discussed below.

Another common theory about why integrated schools should improve outcomes for students of color also derives from the likelihood that schools whose students are largely

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"minority" also tend to be high poverty schools. The high concentration of "health, social, and neighborhood problems that are found in high poverty schools" is considered an impediment to creating a high quality learning environment (Orfield, 1994). This theory is certainly consistent with reports of teachers and principals, who commonly complain that in classrooms with large numbers of poor children, it is difficult to teach because so much time is spent on discipline and social work.

(4) Facilitate access to the mainstream economic power structure - This is a currently popular argument for school integration. The notion is that whites still control the majority of capital and still run most organizations in America, so if children of color are to succeed in mainstream labor markets as adults, they need to have access to mainstream institutions that were previously closed to them. Marian Wright Edelman expressed this idea in 1975 more eloquently than contemporary commentators:

> Our history of segregation and slavery is replete with the lesson that in a society in which the majority rules, a minority can have no equal opportunity if it is separated and denied the right - even if some choose not to exercise it - to associate and share with those who control the instruments of power. Even if a quality education were provided for every child tomorrow, it would not solve the question of racial segregation in public education. (Edelman, 1975)

Integrated schools are thought to provide children of color with comfort and interpersonal skills in heterogeneous settings as well as actual networks of associates among classmates and classmates' parents that might facilitate future career success or postsecondary educational attainment (Wells, 1995).

(5) Promote racial harmony and an integrated society - This objective was not articulated in the Supreme Court decision, but over time it became perhaps the single most potent motivator for integration advocates. The ideal behind this objective is stated succinctly by Christopher Jencks: "If we want a segregated society, we should have segregated schools. If we want a desegregated society, we should have desegregated schools." (cited in Bates, 1990) The expectation is that children of different races who attend school together will learn to recognize their common humanity and respect their cultural differences. Integration advocates cite the increasing ethnic and racial diversity of American society as well as the

globalization of the economy, and argue that we must learn to get along together if we would like to be an economically and socially successful nation in the twenty-first century. The specters of Rwanda, Ireland, and Bosnia are raised as worst case scenarios if we do not attend to our interracial relationships.

Integration Policy Effects - Empirical Evidence

The goals of integration policy, just reviewed, are quite lofty, but this idealism is probably commensurate with the levels of difficulty and upheaval that are often required to implement these policies. Integration policies have now been in place for about thirty years - long enough that a large body of social science data has been collected to measure the results of integration relative to the goals. Education policy makers would like to be in a position, by this time, to assess with confidence the effects of integration policies, but unfortunately this is not possible. The quality of integration studies has been hampered by the difficulty of measuring the desired dependent variables, the amount of data and statistical sophistication required to isolate the effects of a desegregation policy, the pressure on researchers to produce evaluations quickly after integration policies have been implemented, and the failure to set up experimental or even quasi-experimental study designs (Hawley, 1992; Schofield, 1995). A further complication is that it is difficult to compare studies conducted in different cities because of vast differences in environment and policies as well as the small sizes and differing directions of the measured effects. Not only are there quality problems, but the studies of desegregation almost always focus on African Americans and whites, and do not include children of other ethnicities. Despite these weaknesses, several meta-analyses have been conducted, and it is from these sources that this brief summary will be largely drawn.

Before summarizing the results of empirical studies of integration efforts, two pervasive factors that inhibited integration policy objectives from being fully realized must be noted: the first is "white flight" and the second is "tracking." The departure of many white families from cities and from urban public schools, which was described in Section II, has made integration virtually impossible in many urban school systems. Obviously, this has limited integration's effects.

"Tracking" is the nationally common practice of assigning students to different "ability" groups or classes based on their perceived intelligence. Often there are three tracks, each designed to prepare students for a different sector of the workforce, with more challenging material reserved for those targeted for college and vocational or rudimentary classes for students expected to work or attend technical schools following high school. A series of studies by Jeannie Oakes and other researchers reveal that such tracks in integrated school buildings are often racially segregated, with the upper tracks filled mostly with white students and lower tracks with students of color. The standards used to assign students to the tracks are not applied consistently, with students of color disproportionately assigned to lower tracks than white students at a given ability level (Oakes, 1995). The result is that, even if students of different races attend the same school, they may not be receiving a truly integrated education or equal educational opportunities:

> [C]onsiderable research demonstrates that students do not profit from enrollment in low-track classes; they do not learn as much as comparably skilled students in heterogeneous classes; they have less access than other students to knowledge, engaging learning experiences, and resources. Thus, school tracking practices create racially separate programs that provide minority children with restricted educational opportunities and outcomes. (Oakes, 1995)

The practice of tracking and the reality of white departures from urban public schools have thus impeded the implementation of classroom-by-classroom integration, upon which many of the integration objectives rest. With these factors in mind, highlights of the research on integration relative to the policy objectives will be presented.

The Supreme Court's concern about the impact of *stigma* on the self-esteem of African American children, which was based on research available at the time, has since been widely questioned. Even if there were a harmful stigma to attending black schools in 1954, the elimination of compulsory separation may have alleviated the effect. On the other hand, Jonathan Kozol in his book, *Savage Inequalities*, records the voices of children in cities and suburbs who are quite conscious of the unfair differences between their schools (Kozol, 1991). The main source of skepticism about the Supreme Court's finding about stigma concerns the harm to self-esteem; the body of research that was generated in the seventies to

test this issue found first, that self esteem is not a major problem for African Americans or Hispanics, and second that "desegregation has no clear-cut consistent impact" on self-esteem (Schofield, 1995). On the related question about whether students of color are harmed in the workplace or in school admissions due to the stigma attached to segregated schools, there is little research. However, desegregation researcher Robert Crain "found that employers of high school graduates often assume that black students at predominantly black schools have learned less than their black peers from predominantly white schools, even when the academic performance of the two types of students is similar." (Hawley, 1992) Integrated schooling, therefore, may not affect student self-esteem, but it may benefit students by alleviating a source of discrimination in the workplace.

Empirical findings of the effects of integration on *resource and opportunity equality* show very mixed results. On the positive side, "Desegregation often resulted in improvements in the quality of the facilities and learning materials to which blacks had access." (Hawley, 1992) Some of the improvement may have come from gaining access to previously white schools, and resources were also enhanced by the addition of state and federal subsidies to desegregated schools. Despite these gains, gross inequities remain in the funding and opportunities available to minority and white students, due to inequities within and across districts and to inequities within integrated schools.

Unfortunately, broad national measures of these inequities do not appear to exist, but studies have documented various dimensions of inequality, as have numerous court cases. School facilities in many of our cities are deteriorating rapidly, and successful court cases have challenged these conditions in some states (Crampton and Whitney, 1995). Teacher quality is unfairly distributed, with the least qualified teachers assigned to the poorest and highest minority schools (Guiton and Oakes, 1995). A similar bias exists in access to computers, equipment, and laboratories (Guiton and Oakes, 1995). Curriculum offerings can also vary substantially between schools, with low-income, high-minority schools offering fewer advanced courses (Guiton and Oakes, 1995; Kozol, 1991). And, as already discussed, even within integrated schools opportunities can be unequal due to tracking.

When resources vary between districts, the culprit is usually the reliance on property taxes to fund public schools, since this type of tax generally raises more funds at a lower tax rate in suburbs than in cities. Despite a flurry of law suits targeting interdistrict funding inequalities, including successful outcomes in California, Texas, New Jersey, and Kentucky, progress has been slow. The irony is that integration may be partly responsible for interdistrict inequities, since white families' departures from central cities have contributed to the decline of urban tax bases. Integration also has entailed racially identified ability tracking, which is a within-school cause in unequal educational opportunities. Several districts have lost law suits on this basis (Oakes, 1995).

Research on the impact of integration on *outcomes* is also mixed, but several meta-analyses that have been conducted on the topic all draw a similar conclusion: integration can bring about small but significant increases in minority student achievement, especially in reading, and does not affect white achievement (Schofield, 1995; Hawley, 1992). The studies upon which this finding is based varied widely in their methodologies and time frame as well as in their results; some studies show negative impacts, but most show positive or neutral results. One interpretation of this variation is that integration's effectiveness may depend on how it is implemented. Studies suggest that desegregation plans that include early grades and are voluntary may be most effective (Schofield, 1995). Also, districts that resegregate students within integrated schools through tracking may magnify outcome inequities (Oakes, 1995).

The finding of positive test score effects is contrary to popular understandings of the impact of integration; this may be a reflection of the high expectations people hold for such a significant social policy. For parents, who may be hoping for a noticeable short-term payoff for their child's long bus ride, the achievement improvements attributable to desegregation may be too small to detect. And for school districts spending considerable resources on desegregation plans without strong support from parents, their declining or stable test scores may be a political headache.

Ardent integration activists are fond of citing results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which shows some improvement in the gap between white and non-

Asian minority test scores over the past few decades. While this change is indeed heartening, and while it has corresponded with the period of integration in this country, there is no evidence tying the national test scores with integration. The implied attribution is spurious.

To measure integration's effect on *access to mainstream economic power structures*, researchers test long-term dependent variables like college choice, college completion, and occupational outcomes. For all of these measures, attending integrated schools appears to have some positive influence, but the evidence is not strong (Schofield, 1995). College choice is a controversial topic, since there is disagreement over the relative societal benefits from black students attending historically black colleges versus a multi-racial institutions; integration researchers consider the choice by a black student to attend a high status, mixed race institution to be a positive outcome, because it correlates with higher future earnings and better job prospects (Wells, 1995). College completion rates appear to be positively influenced by integration for southern blacks, but not for those living in the north. Evidence for effects on occupational outcomes, including salary and employment sector, is weak, but it is weakly positive (Dawkins, 1994; Wells, 1995; Schofield, 1995).

Empirical evidence about the influence of integrated schooling on *racial harmony* is extremely difficult to interpret. The studies cited above regarding black participation in traditionally white colleges and occupations provide an indicator of harmony, since it appears that blacks from integrated schools are slightly more willing than those from segregated schools to move in non-black communities. More direct evidence about what are referred to as "intergroup attitudes" is absolutely inconclusive; study results vary widely (Schofield, 1995). Racial harmony is simply too difficult for social scientists to measure effectively.

Tracking would seem to be a major impediment to the achievement of this objective, since children who do not attend class together are less likely to learn to get along with one another. In fact, studies suggest that one of the most effective ways to promote positive intergroup attitudes is through equal status contact, such as that which would occur in a multiracial classroom of children with similar abilities (Grant, 1990); yet Oakes' research

reveals that unfair tracking practices often separate children of similar abilities by race (Oakes, 1995).

This review of the findings of empirical research on school integration does not generate a particularly compelling case for the policy. Across all of the objectives advocates hold for integration, studies confirm small advantages. Because of the difficulty of testing integration's effectiveness, it is hard to know what to conclude from these findings. Advocates believe that integration is much more effective than the research has been able to indicate, and it has vast symbolic importance as one of the most important social policies we have in place to try to secure interracial equity.

Even so, the case that is made for integration through these five objectives is severely handicapped politically by depending mostly on expected advantages for children of color, with the exception of the objective of racial harmony. This puts integration advocates in the difficult position of asking for support from white families for a policy that is mostly for other families' children. For a long time this plea worked; from liberal guilt and black self-interest, spiked with a healthy dose of compulsion from the courts and federal agencies, sufficient support for mandatory busing was cobbled together to keep the policies in place. As we will see in the Seattle case that follows, however, this fragile base of support is now weakened in the face of rhetoric calling for education quality to be prioritized over integration policies.

IV. The Seattle Case

Seattle provides an illustrative example of the dynamics of desegregation politics. Since 1972, the Seattle School District has employed desegregation policies that entail mandatory busing. Unlike many other school districts, Seattle has never been under court order to desegregate, although likelihood of a successful law suit has been an important factor in policy-makers' choices. Despite this distinction, the politics of desegregation in Seattle resemble those in the rest of the country, including a growing movement to return to neighborhood schools. As in other localities, the opposition to busing in Seattle is no longer limited to white parents in racially homogenous neighborhoods. Today, the impetus to change the student assignment plan is coming from inside the school district administration, including the superintendent and a majority of the school board, as well as from other prominent local politicians. Furthermore, some of the most vocal neighborhood schools advocates in Seattle at this time are African American.

This section will explore the politics and practical realities of school desegregation in Seattle with the objective of highlighting issues that are common in desegregating districts nationwide. Information for this section is drawn from available documents, news reports, and numerous interviews of Seattlites who either are or have been involved in the desegregation debate in this city. The scope of this project permitted too few interviews to justify generalizations about Seattlites' views on desegregation, but the stature and expertise of those who were interviewed do facilitate speculations about the political future of desegregation in this city. Perhaps more importantly, the interviews enhanced the author's understanding of the nuances of the situation in Seattle. The section will begin with a brief history of desegregation in Seattle. The history is not the main focus of this case study; it is intended merely to provide the groundwork for understanding the current political situation. This will be followed by an in-depth examination of the controlled choice plan in effect today. Recent events relating to desegregation will be described next, followed by a discussion of the main arguments made in Seattle to justify change. The desegregation debate nationwide is obscured

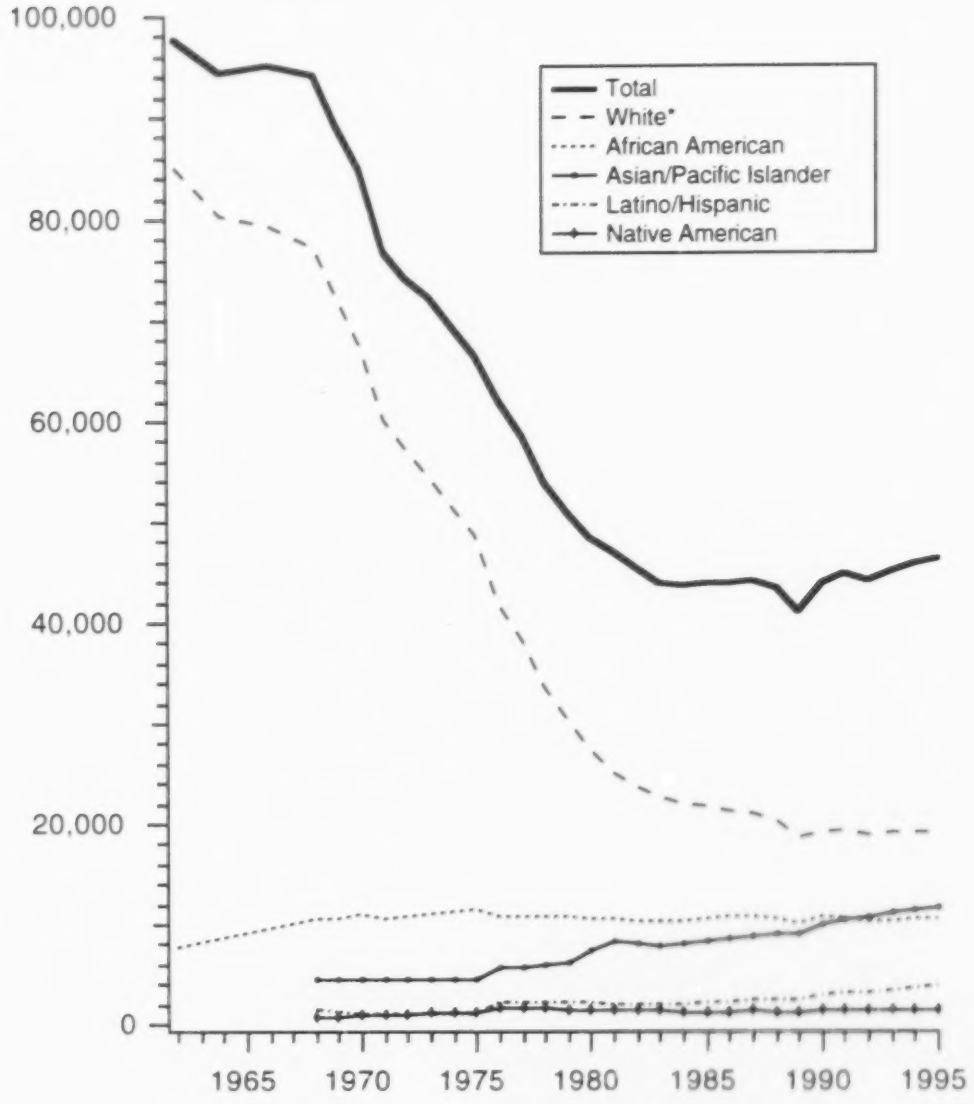
by mythology about what researchers know about schooling; when myths arise in the local debate, they will be identified and the available relevant research will be discussed. Finally, a short discussion of the proposed alternatives closes out the Seattle case.

History of Desegregation in Seattle

Desegregation policy-making in Seattle has been complicated and contentious. To best understand this history, three characteristics of Seattle Public Schools should be delineated. First, the demographics of the Seattle Public Schools student body have changed dramatically over the past thirty-five years. Total enrollments of white students declined throughout the period of desegregation in Seattle, as can be seen in Figure 2 on the next page; this decline cannot be solely or directly attributed to desegregation policies, since economic recessions and nationwide growth of suburbs coincided with the establishment of desegregation policies. The departure of white students from the district, as well as immigration of Asian, Pacific Islander, and Latino students has radically altered the racial and ethnic composition of the district as well, as Figure 3 clearly shows. School board members have been attentive to this trend, and some current and past board members associate changing demographics of the students with desegregation policies.

Second, housing patterns and geography in Seattle complicate desegregation policy implementation, since whites are concentrated in the north end of the city and minorities in the south end of the city, and bodies of water create natural boundaries that limit transportation options. Finally, Seattle has never been ordered by a court to desegregate its schools. Lawsuits have been initiated on occasion to encourage change, but in each case the school district implemented desegregation policies to avert litigation. These compromises testify to both the potential strength of the case and the desire on the part of the school board for the political cover of a threatened law suit on which they could blame their actions. The absence of a court order is valuable to the Seattle Public Schools because the district controls its own desegregation policy-making; this has made implementation of the busing plans somewhat less painful than in other cities because the community has had "ownership" of the policies. These three factors underlie the history that follows.

Figure 2:
Seattle Public Schools Enrollment, 1962-1995



*White and "other" categories are combined through 1975, after which the "other" category was eliminated.

Note: 1971 figures are slightly lower than they should be because data were not available for special students.

Source: Annual Seattle School District publications. For 1962-1981: Racial Distribution of Students and Staff (1968-1981 versions); for 1982-1995: Data Profile (1987-1995 versions).

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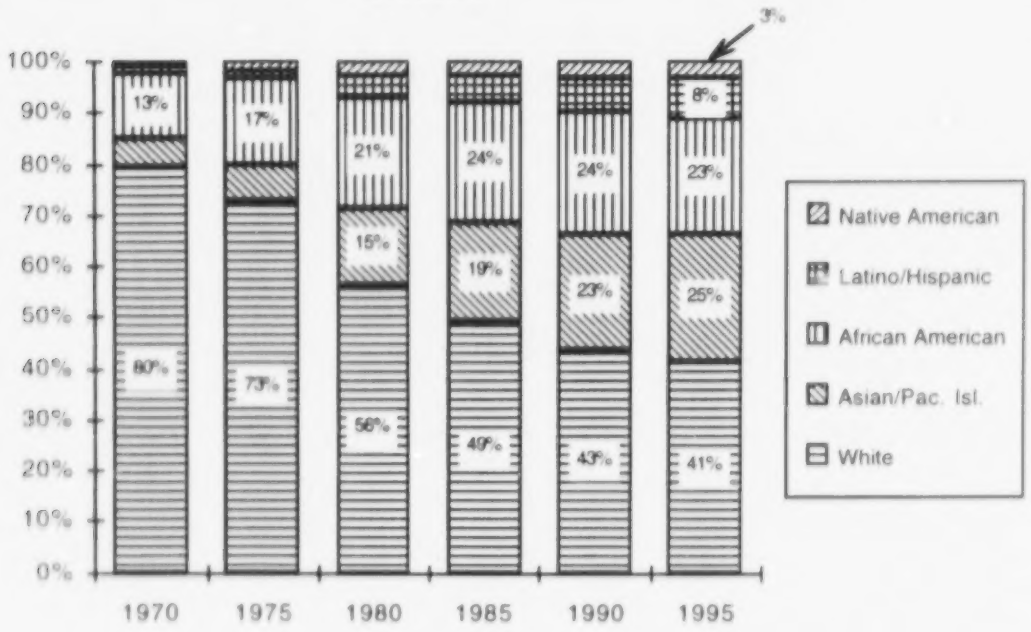
Figure 3: Racial/Ethnic Composition of Seattle Public Schools Students



Source: Annual Seattle School District publications (see Figure 2).

Desegregation policies in Seattle have passed through three different phases so far, beginning in the early sixties.[2] Each phase is distinguishable by the different strategies that were pursued, but they have in common that opposition to mandatory desegregation policies became vocal and organized at some point during each phase. Some of the most prominent strategies nationwide for desegregating schools have been tried during the three phases of desegregation in Seattle, including voluntary measures, mandatory school pairings, and controlled choice.

The **first phase** of desegregation in Seattle lasted from 1963 to 1977, and relied on voluntary measures, along with small scale mandatory efforts. The voluntary measures entailed allowing or encouraging transfers between schools within the district through program placement and magnet schools. The mandatory measures included closing a predominantly

[2]Information in this history section comes from both interviews and documents. Particularly informative documents include the following: Angelos, 1989; Municipal League, 1979; Roe, 1990; and Siqueland, 1981.

minority school on the south end and reassigning the students to north-end schools in 1968. Another mandatory measure was a middle school desegregation plan that was passed by the school board in January 1971, but its implementation was delayed for almost two years due to a lawsuit by an anti-busing group named Citizens against Mandatory Busing. This same group gathered sufficient signatures to trigger a school board recall election in 1973; the board retained its seats by less than a one-percent margin.

Five years later, in mid-1977, the **second phase** of school desegregation in Seattle began when the school board resolved to desegregate the schools within two years, then passed "The Seattle Plan" later in the year. An impressive coalition of community groups and individual activists came together to advocate for a comprehensive and mandatory desegregation plan. Prominently involved groups included the American Civil Liberties Union, the Church Council of Greater Seattle, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; these organizations initiated judicial and federal-administrative actions against the school district to convince the board to act. Other important organizations joined the advocacy efforts at the height of the campaign in 1977, including the Urban League, Chamber of Commerce and the Municipal League. The central sales pitch to the public was that a homegrown desegregation plan was preferable to a court-ordered one.

The school board vote for "The Seattle Plan" was 6-1, with Ellen Roe, who is still on the school board today, as the single dissenting vote. The Seattle Plan paired or triaded elementary schools in minority and white areas of the city, and designated one school for grades 1-2 and the other for grades 3-5. Junior and senior high school feeder patterns were altered so that children who attended elementary schools together would remain together in the upper grades. There were some magnet-type schools and programs as well. The Plan was implemented in the fall of 1978.

A backlash began immediately upon passage of the policy. A new anti-busing parent's group was formed, Citizens for Voluntary Integration Committee (CiVIC). This group authored a state-wide ballot measure, Initiative 350, that sought to prohibit school districts from assigning students to schools other than those nearest or next-nearest to their home. In

November 1978 the measure passed by 66 percent of the statewide vote, with 60 percent of Seattle voters favoring the measure. The Seattle School District, calculating that it would be less expensive to oppose the measure than to defend itself against a desegregation suit, committed its in-house attorneys to a court challenge of Initiative 350. The case, *Washington v. Seattle School District No. 1*, was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in a narrow 5-4 decision in 1982 that Initiative 350 was unconstitutional. In the majority opinion, Justice Blackmun explained, "...it uses the racial nature of an issue to define the governmental decisionmaking structure, and thus imposes substantial and unique burdens on racial minorities." (458 U.S. 457 (1982)) The final argument to the Supreme Court was made by the Seattle school district's current general counsel, Mike Hoge.

In 1988, the current and **third phase** of Seattle school desegregation began with the unanimous passage by the school board of a controlled choice student assignment plan. This major shift in policy was made in response to community and school district concerns that The Seattle Plan required excessive busing (10,000 for racial balance), bused students of color disproportionately, and left some schools under-enrolled while others were over-enrolled (Angelos, 1988; Roe, 1990). There were further concerns about declining enrollments of white students and the overall costs and complexity of the plan (Seattle School District, "1995-96 Student Assignment Strategies and Plan," 1995a). Modeled on a program in the Cambridge, Massachusetts school district, which has many fewer students, the controlled choice plan lets parents select a school for their child from a carefully engineered subset of Seattle's schools. The subset, or cluster, generally includes some schools close to the child's home and some in a racially different neighborhood in the other end of the city. Families of children who are new to the district, are changing school levels (elementary to middle, middle to high), or wish to transfer between schools can list as many schools as they wish on their choice list, in order of preference.

As with the previous Seattle Plan, the controlled choice plan was crafted over several years and had the support of many liberal, minority, and business groups, but was also opposed by a coalition of mostly north end parents. This opposition group was not satisfied

with the policy that was selected, and in 1989, anti-busing activists, including a prominent mayoral candidate, Doug Jewitt, formed a new organization called Save our Schools. SOS's mission was to promote a local voter initiative that offered the Seattle School District six percent of city revenues in exchange for eliminating all mandatory busing. The additional funds were to be spent on improvements to neighborhood schools. The initiative was on the ballot with the mayoral race between Jewitt and Norm Rice, and the busing issue was the major topic of the campaign. Indeed, Rice entered the race on the last possible filing date because, he said, he was uncomfortable with the predominance of the anti-busing issue and felt that it was polarizing the city. The momentum of the anti-busing forces was fueled by drastic mismanagement by the school district of the new student assignment process. The voters sent a mixed message about their feelings about busing on election day: Rice won the mayoralty over the anti-busing candidate, *and* the anti-busing initiative passed by a slim, absentee ballot margin. Six weeks later, the Seattle school board turned down the initiative's offer of money from the city budget to finance magnet schools and other voluntary integration programs, which meant that the initiative had no effects. The busing issue was put to rest temporarily, but even at that time, many prominent pro-integration Seattlites, including the mayor-elect and the superintendent, claimed that they favored a shift to voluntary integration policies in the near future.

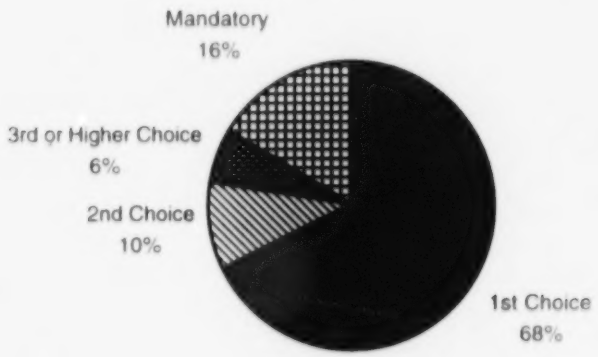
Controlled Choice Today

Before introducing the recent developments in the desegregation saga in Seattle, it will be useful to describe some of the characteristics of the current controlled choice plan as implemented today. Approximately 20,000 students per year apply to receive a school assignment. As can be seen in the pie chart in Figure 4, most students (68 percent) receive their first choice school, others receive their second or higher (3rd, 4th, 5th, et cetera) choice (16 percent), and 16 percent receive mandatory assignments, i.e. are assigned to a school that was not on their choice list (Seattle School District, "Student Assignment Process," 1995).

If the number of students of a particular race who pick a school as their first choice exceeds the school's capacity for that race, assignments are made using tiebreakers (Seattle

School District, "1995-96 Student Assignment Strategies and Plan," 1995a). Preference is given to students with siblings in the school, students making desegregation positive choices (a student of color choosing a predominantly white school, and visa versa), neighborhood residents, and neighborhood child care recipients, in that order. If there are still slots available in the school, they are assigned by

Figure 4: Seattle Student Assignments, 1995



Source: Seattle School District, "Student Assignment Process," 1995.

random lottery. Students whose choice sets are submitted to the district after the official deadline are less likely to get their first choice, since on-time applications are processed first.

The obvious and crucial question is: how many students do not get their first choice due to racial balance requirements? Unfortunately, this question is difficult to answer. In the 1994-1995 choice period, about 350 students were denied their first choice school due to racial balance; this means that the chosen schools had space for students, but had reached their racial balance limit for students of the race or ethnicity of the applicants. Thus we can consider 350 to be the minimum response to the question. The actual figure is likely to be much higher, however, due to the following three factors that mask the impacts of the desegregation plan on families' school choices:

- *Overcrowding* - The school district attributes most of its denials of first choices to "limited capacity," meaning that the school is full. This phenomenon, however, is closely related to

desegregation, since a commitment to busing students to the north end of Seattle, where schools have excess capacity, has obviated the need to build schools on the south end, where schools are overcrowded. In other words, in the absence of a desegregation busing plan, the school board might have chosen to build more schools in the south end. Southeast Seattle is the only region of the school district in which the number of local public school students exceeds both local maximum capacity and actual local enrollment; in the rest of the city there is substantial excess capacity relative to the local student population (Seattle School District, "Student Assignment Process," 1995).[3] Thus, some unknown proportion of the first choice denials due to overcrowding can be attributed to racial balance requirements.

- *Playing the system* - A student's expressed first choice may not be her true first choice if the family believes that the student is unlikely to be assigned to the true first choice school due to racial balance quotas or overcrowding. The assignment system places a premium on fulfilling the first choices; once the first choice is denied, however, a student is equally likely to be given a mandatory assignment to a school not on her choice list as she is to be given one of her "higher" (second, third, fourth, etc.) choices. Thus, if a family feels fairly favorable about the true second choice, and does not expect to get assigned to the true first choice, they may switch their expressed choices.
- *Bilingual program placement* - Bilingual programs are not available in every school, and the programs are placed disproportionately in north end schools to boost the minority enrollment of those schools, even though most bilingual students live in the south end of the district. Therefore, a bilingual family may really like a particular school in their cluster, but be unable to choose it first because of the absence of a bilingual program.

[3]The overcrowding in southeast Seattle may partially explain why African American students are disproportionately denied their first choice. Although African Americans represented 22 percent of the district's students in 1994, they comprised 29 percent of the students who were denied their first choice, according to an unpublished Seattle School District chart.

Because of these complicating factors, it is difficult to estimate the degree of "control" in the controlled choice plan. The widespread impression in Seattle, as will be seen next, is that the plan needs to be revised in favor of less busing.

Recent Developments

Starting in 1995, a new round of desegregation debate in Seattle began. The newly-hired superintendent, John Stanford, indicated both publicly and in private conversations with community members and district employees that he was amenable to changing the student assignment plan to decrease mandatory busing. Also last fall, one of the school board members, Don Nielsen, made several public statements in favor of neighborhood schools, including an op-ed piece in one of the local papers (Nielsen, 1995). Members of the central administration began assessing alternatives to the current plan, and in November they presented a report to the school board entitled, "Student Assignment Process," which focused on the impacts of busing (Seattle School District, 1995). These opening salvos in the latest round of the on-going debate garnered a great deal of attention and mostly favorable responses in the public and the press, including editorials in both major newspapers endorsing a return to neighborhood schools (Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 1995; Seattle Times, 1995).

The "Student Assignment Process" report presents a great deal of important data about the desegregation plan, but it is clearly a political document intended to bolster the case for neighborhood schools. For example, the most publicized finding in the report is that low income students who are bused to a school outside of their region of the city (the city was divided in to five regions for purposes of the analysis) fare more poorly on standardized tests than their non-bused counterparts. For reasons that will be discussed in detail in the next sub-section, the test score discrepancy probably should not be blamed on busing, yet the school board and superintendent allowed and promoted that interpretation.

Leadership of the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington and the Church Council of Greater Seattle, along with several other concerned individuals, sent a letter to the school board in response to the "Student Assignment Process" report. The signatories of the letter, "call upon the Seattle Public Schools Board not to abandon its commitment to racial

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integration." They argue for this position primarily by highlighting the importance of racial tolerance and understanding: "We live and work in a multi-racial society. This is especially true of Seattle, a city which is increasingly a hub of commerce with Asia and the rest of the world. We must teach our children to live cooperatively, constructively and respectfully with people different from themselves." The letter also points out analytical weaknesses and misleading aspects of the "Student Assignment Process" report, with the intention, according to one of the signatories, of forcing the district to base any major policy change on higher quality and more extensive analyses of the current system. The letter does not call for a continuation of the current controlled choice policy, but it does advocate a continued emphasis on integration in whatever alternatives are considered.

The importance of this letter in the desegregation discussion in Seattle derives from the fact that the signatory organizations have previously threatened to sue the school district over its desegregation policies. Clearly, the school district would prefer to avoid the expense of litigation and the possibility of court interference in their policy-making, although board members have expressed skepticism that a law suit in today's legal and political atmosphere would succeed. This letter represents the only pro-desegregation action taken since the school district began discussing a return to neighborhood schools.

Two other recent events in Seattle are relevant to the desegregation questions. In November, members of the school board appeared before the state board of education to request a waiver or a change in state policy about integration. At issue for the Seattle school board is $34 million in state matching funds for school construction. It is not clear whether these funds would actually be endangered by a more neighborhood schools-oriented student assignment policy, but several board members appear to require assurance on this point before they will seriously contemplate alternatives to controlled choice. The state board's decision is still pending at this writing. In February, Seattle voters narrowly turned down the school district's requests for continuation of a maintenance and operations levy and for a technology levy. Until the levy passes, the district is unlikely to move forward with the controversial

questions about desegregation. The maintenance and operations levy will reappear on the ballot in March.

The Issues in Seattle

Seattle is in only the early stages of its next transition in desegregation policy, but already it is apparent that the conversation about the issue among opinion leaders has altered dramatically since 1989. No major political figure appears willing to defend the status quo or even to articulate benefits of school integration - not the mayor, not the superintendent, and not a single member of the school board. The major organizations and leaders of the African American community have remained silent on the issue thus far, except for some that are vocally supporting the shift away from integration. Liberal organizations, with the exception of the ACLU, appear reluctant to get behind desegregation without support in the African American community. And all of this change is *not* a response to an anti-busing populist backlash. It is less clear, because of a lack of recent polling data on the subject, whether the electorate or parents have also shifted their views, but there is no evidence to suggest that desegregation advocacy has gained strength recently, even if it has not lost strength.

A reflection of the changed environment around desegregation is that the arguments *for* desegregation have been mostly made behind closed doors recently. They are the same as the national objectives for desegregation outlined in Section III, since local advocates are unable to point to specific benefits in Seattle, except the integrated schools themselves. This does not mean that there are not benefits to integration in Seattle, only that whatever benefits there are cannot be easily measured or demonstrated.

A host of compelling, if not always accurate, arguments form the case *against* Seattle's controlled choice plan. These arguments as a group have convinced many Seattlites that the benefits of integration are outweighed by the costs of the current policy. Although some of the arguments draw on the specifics of Seattle's situation, they are overall quite similar to the arguments now being made in cities across the country. The main arguments that consistently emerged in interviews and articles against the Seattle controlled choice plan, particularly the busing aspects of the plan, are (1) inhibits parent involvement, (2) disproportionately burdens

students of color, (3) does not improve outcomes for students of color, (4) causes middle class flight, and (5) harms community cohesion. Each of these will be explored in turn.

(1) Inhibits parent involvement - This objection is perhaps the most common one made against the current policy. It is a favorite claim of the superintendent and school board members, especially Don Nielsen, who explains in an op-ed piece,

> Mandatory busing failed to achieve its goals, not because of race or ethnic origin, but because busing takes the parent out of the child's education. What happens with mandatory busing is that children are taken out of their neighborhoods and bused across the city. This causes the parents to be disengaged from their children's educational activities and makes it virtually impossible for them to regain their involvement. ...[The] decline in achievement...is primarily the result of removing two or more of the key adults from involvement in the child's education. (Nielsen, 1995)

This conception that busing a child far from his community makes it harder for parents to be partners with the school has intuitive strength and it echoes the observations of teachers and principals. There are no empirical data from Seattle or from other districts to corroborate this specific idea, however, perhaps because researchers consider it too obvious to study. Despite the apparent strength of this idea, several factors suggest that Seattle policy-makers should be cautious about the level of emphasis they place on parent involvement as a rationale for neighborhood schools.

First, the demon for those who are concerned about parent involvement is mandatory busing, which affects a relatively small proportion of all 18,000 Seattle students who are bused daily. Only about 1,900 elementary school students in the 1994-1995 school year rode the bus between the north and south ends of Seattle (includes both directions), and some of these did so by choice (Seattle School District, "Student Assignment Process," 1995). Even if 1,500 elementary school students ride the bus between ends of the city against their preference (this figure is purely speculative), this only represents about three percent of all Seattle public school students. Some middle and high school students also ride buses to distant schools against their preference, but family partnerships are less emphasized for these older students.

Second, the parent involvement argument made by neighborhood schools advocates assumes that parents need to be present in the school. Leading parent involvement researcher Joyce Epstein calls this the "bodies-in-the-building fallacy," in which educators ignore the

important contributions parents can make from home (Epstein, 1996). Indeed, research reveals that, "school-based parent involvement strategies appear to have limited direct value for low-income parents, whereas strategies such as parent tutoring, which move the site of interaction to the home, seem to yield positive outcomes for all participants, students, parents, and teachers." (McLaughlin and Shields, 1986)

Third, the parent involvement argument implies that distance from the school is the primary determinant of whether parents will be involved: as Nielsen writes, distance "causes parents to be disengaged." Empirical studies find that the link is not so direct; there are plenty of neighborhood schools with low parent participation and many busing schools have wonderful family partnerships. It appears that the crucial determinant of successful parent involvement, regardless of distance, is thoughtful programming at the school that takes a broad conception of the objectives of and the barriers to parent involvement (Epstein, 1996).[4] Distance may make parent involvement more challenging, but a busing school with well-developed programs of partnership will probably be more successful at involving parents than a neighborhood school with weak programs.

Finally, neighborhood schools advocates often believe that parent involvement is the key to improving student achievement. Studies have been unable to prove or disprove decisively this claim (Jennings, 1990). Even the most ardent advocates of parent involvement, however, recognize that it is neither necessary nor sufficient for school success. For example, James Comer wrote,

> I acknowledge that schools can be improved without significant parent participation. Indeed, because of cutbacks in Chapter 1 funds, we have sharply reduced parent participation in our two earlier project schools, and the high level of achievement has continued. School improvement has occurred in a number of schools across the country in which the presence of parents is minimal. (Comer, 1986)

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[4]Norfolk's experience illustrates this point. To justify returning to a neighborhood school plan from a mandatory busing plan, Norfolk lawyers convinced a federal judge that parent involvement would improve as a result of the change. Yet in the ten all-black schools that resulted from the end of busing, P.T.A. membership was dramatically lower after the transition. It may be that more black parents belonged to the P.T.A. in their neighborhood school than they had in a distant school, but even so, the participation rates were much lower in the racially homogenous neighborhood schools than in the integrated and white schools (Meldrum and Eaton, 1994). Well-designed, school-based programs to reach out to parents and take advantage of their capacities could have vastly improved Norfolk's parent involvement outcome (Comer, 1988).

In sum, while it is sagacious for district leaders to emphasize parent involvement in schools, its benefits, and the importance of busing as an impediment to parent involvement in the Seattle Public Schools, can be oversold.

(2) Disproportionately burdens students of color - The second argument against Seattle's controlled choice plan is that it requires a higher proportion of students of color to be bused. This circumstance might be more tolerable for the community if the educational opportunities students of color were receiving at the end of the bus ride seemed superior to those which they would receive close to home, but this is not obviously the case.

The school district's "Student Assignment Process" document provides substantial data about the inequity of movement in the current plan. The primary mechanism in the controlled choice plan to promote integration is the structure of the elementary school clusters, each of which (with the exception of southwest Seattle) has some schools in north Seattle and some schools in south Seattle. In almost any instance that a child chooses or is compelled to attend a school in the opposite end of her cluster, the move is desegregation positive. Therefore, analysis of which elementary school students are being bused north-to-south and south-to-north in the clusters, which tend to be long bus rides, reveals the distribution of most of the burden of desegregation busing in the district. These end-to-end bus riders, some of whom choose voluntarily to make the trip, are broken down by race and ethnic group and program enrollment in the following table:

Table 3: Elementary Schools Students Traveling End-to-End in their Cluster by Ethnicity or Program, Fall 1995

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent
Asian	396	21%
African Amer.	500	26%
Hispanic-Lat.	82	4%
Native Amer.	24	1%
White	226	12%
Special Educ.	20	1%
Bilingual	650	34%
Total	1898	100%

Note: Students in special education or bilingual programs were excluded from the ethnic counts.
Source: Seattle School District, "Student Assignment Process," 1995.

Although the ratio of students of color to whites in the district as a whole is 3:2, the data in Table 3 reveal that among end-to-end bus riders the ratio is more than 7:1. Whites comprise more than 40 percent of Seattle public school students, but only 12 percent of the end-to-end bus riders are white. African American students are slightly over-represented at 26 percent of end-to-end bused students versus 23 percent of the total school district population; this difference is much smaller than expected based on interviews with African American community leaders. Apparently it is Seattle's bilingual students who truly shoulder the "burden" of the racial balance objectives. This year, there are 5,089 bilingual students in the district, eleven percent of all students, yet 34 percent of the cross-regional bus riders are bilingual students. As discussed previously, this result is engineered by the district as part of its desegregation plan through its placements of bilingual programs. It should be emphasized that not all of this movement is involuntary; in fact, "Thirty percent of the elementary bilingual students choose a school outside of their region even if there is a school with services in their neighborhood." (Seattle School District, "Student Assignment Process," 1995)

Three factors help to explain the origins of the inequity of movement. The first is space limitations, which, as discussed earlier, dictate that students in southeast Seattle must be bused because there is not enough room for them in the schools in their region. The second explanatory factor is the structure of the clusters. Each elementary school choice cluster (with the exception of the southwest cluster) contains schools in central or south Seattle and schools north of the Ship Canal. The split is not even, however; the students in the south end of the cluster have only two or three schools from which to choose in their neighborhood (and these are often over-crowded), while north end students have four to six schools from which to choose close to home. The final factor that contributes to inequality of movement is "compliance": white students are less likely to show up, in the fall, at the school to which they were assigned through the student assignment process than students of color (73 percent versus 81 percent). White families may have more options in the private sector, or may be more effective in lobbying the district for a change in their original assignment.

Resentment over the inequality of movement is exacerbated by the perception of some Seattlites that whites get more out of desegregation in Seattle than people of color. The benefits to whites that are cited are the following: First, desegregation has helped to keep north Seattle elementary schools open because of declining local enrollment in that region. Second, white children in north Seattle have more to gain from school integration because they would have no access to diversity in the absence of the policy, whereas children of color live, generally, in ethnically diverse neighborhoods and in "white" society. This point is more salient in Seattle than it would be in a city with a more impoverished urban core. Because of these factors, desegregation in Seattle is seen by some as conferring both unequal burden and unequal benefit.

(3) Does not improve outcomes for students of color - The objective of student achievement is starting to take priority for minority community leaders over integration. An oft-stated refrain during interviews was something like, "I don't oppose integration. But I think we should be focusing our attention and our resources on the quality of the education, rather than the mix of faces in the classroom. Busing is a means, not an end." The basis for their concern is evident when Seattle Public Schools test scores are examined. The eighth grade California Test of Basic Skills scores are summarized in Table 4 below. White students outpace all other races, but the gap is particularly large between African American and white

Table 4: Eighth Grade California Test of Basic Skills Scores, 1991 and 1994, by Race and Receipt of Free or Reduced Price Lunch

	Reading		Language		Mathematics	
	1991	1994	1991	1994	1991	1994
All students	52	51	51	51	52	50
Asian/Pac. Isl.	48	46	52	51	56	54
African American	41	38	39	40	38	35
Latino/Hispanic	48	47	49	45	48	42
Native American	49	53	43	50	43	49
White	62	61	58	57	59	57
NO free/red lunch	59	58	56	56	58	55
YES free/red lunch	41	39	42	42	42	41

Note: Eighth grade is shown here because at this level students have been in the system for a long time, but low achievers have not yet dropped out. The eleventh and fourth grade scores, however, are very similar.

Source: Seattle Public Schools, "Goal Performance Measures," 1995.

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students, and the difference was essentially stable over the four years of tests from 1991 to 1994. Income, which is proxied by qualification for free or reduced price lunch, is another dimension along which scores are quite different, and this may explain some proportion of the gaps among races and ethnic groups.

Knowing that there is a test score gap now, however, reveals nothing about the impact of desegregation on Seattle students' achievement. It is possible, particularly in view of the empirical research summarized in Section III, that without Seattle's racial balance efforts, the test scores of students of color would be even lower. This possibility, however, does not seem to provide much solace for decision-makers in Seattle and elsewhere who must explain a large and stubborn gap in test scores; for some of these leaders, busing is a convenient target. The report entitled "Student Assignment Process" presented at the November 14, 1995 Seattle School Board meeting provided data that seemingly bolstered this position. A prominent finding of the report, as mentioned previously, was a test score deficit for low income students (proxied by those who receive free lunch) who are bused between north and south Seattle as compared to low income students who go to a school in their region. The data are shown in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Reading CAT Test Scores (Grades 2-11) by Free Lunch Status, Ethnic Group, and Location of School Relative to Residence, 1995

	Attending School *IN* Region of Residence	Attending School *OUTSIDE of Region of Residence*
Free Lunch	**40**	**35**
Asian/Pac. Isl.	37	33
African American	36	34
Latino/Hispanic	37	33
Native American	41	42
White	49	49
NOT Free Lunch	**60**	**62**

Note: The findings were similar for other test subjects: For Language, the gap among free lunch students for regional vs. nonregional school attendance was also five points; for Mathematics it was two points.

Source: Seattle School District, "Student Assignment Process," 1995.

The serious allegation embedded in the publication of this finding is that busing itself or distance from home impair poor children's educational achievement; this would call into question any mandatory busing assignments the district makes. The document never explicitly

states this causal link, but neither does it suggest alternative causes for the test score discrepancy. Yet there are quite convincing reasons to believe that the busing-test score link is a correlation rather than a causal relationship, i.e. that low income children who are bused out of their region are likely to be lower achieving for reasons unrelated to the bus ride. As a group, low income cross-regional bus riders are likely to be students of color and/or limited English proficient, relative to the overall student population (see Table 3 above). Both of these characteristics correlate with lower test scores on average regardless of bus ride (see Table 4 above), which almost certainly explains the discrepancy in test scores.

The school district allowed these data to be misused and misinterpreted by the media by presenting them as part of a document that was intended to show the flaws of the controlled choice plan, and by failing to explain that the finding was a correlation and did not imply causation. The day after the study was released, a *Post-Intelligencer* article declared,

> One of Stanford's more dramatic findings was that busing low-income students out of their neighborhoods makes an already tough academic challenge even harder. ...[T]he district has found that poor students who attend schools outside of their neighborhoods scored 5 points lower on reading tests than poor students who attend neighborhood schools. (George, 1995)

This summary reflects the Student Assignment Process report's confounding of the correlation/causation question and mimics the report's use of the term "neighborhood," even though the analysis was done on broad regions of the city, not on neighborhood schools. To be sure, the media treatment of the document may be partly blamed on sloppy reporting, but it appears that misinterpretation of the data was not discouraged by school district leaders (including the school board and the superintendent), either because it facilitates their objective of dismantling the controlled choice plan or because they did not themselves fully understand the complexity of the data.

Even before these data were released, however, it had become clear to community members and policy makers in Seattle and elsewhere that integration is not the key to ensuring equal educational outcomes, even if it does provide other benefits. Having drawn this conclusion, many people advocate a shift in priorities from integration to educational quality. Among those individuals interviewed for this paper who supported a priority shift, most also

disparaged as racist the premise derived from *Brown* that racially separate schools are inherently unequal educationally. Many of the reasons that are offered to explain why integrated schools might be educationally advantageous for students of color are rejected. The suggestion that resources tend to be higher in schools whites attend is countered with the recommendation that we should require resources to follow need. The suggestion that middle class students might provide role models of higher educational ambition for low income students is denied with the claim that teachers dictate ambitions, not fellow students. The apotheosis of the denial that integrated settings are educationally beneficial for students of color is a statement from Justice Clarence Thomas in a concurring opinion in the recent Supreme Court decision about the Kansas City desegregation plan: "It never ceases to amaze me that the courts are so willing to assume that anything that is predominantly black must be inferior." (*Missouri v. Jenkins* (1995)) A common version of this sentiment is, "educational quality is not about who you're sitting next to."

(4) Causes middle class flight - Since the Seattle School District has shrunk by more than half during the past thirty years (see Figure 1), mostly due to declining white enrollment, middle class flight is a very prominent concern. Lately, it has emerged as one of the most popular rationalizations for abandoning the controlled choice plan, even though the white population of the student body has been stable for the past six years. The motive for increasing the number of middle class students in the district is monetary, as explained in a *Seattle Times* editorial last year: "With so many middle-class families fleeing to private schools and suburbs, a greater proportion of the children left behind - bilingual and special needs children, for example - cost more to educate." (*Seattle Times*, 1995) Another monetary motive for drawing Seattle families back into the public schools is that the district is having trouble passing funding levies recently, and people with children in the public schools are more likely than others to support school levies.

Measurement of the influence of desegregation on middle class flight is complicated because simultaneous with the introduction of desegregation in cities were other social changes, such as rising crime rates, growth of suburbs and freeways to access them, and

increased immigration to cities from Central and South America and Asia. Indeed, one can point to cities with out desegregation busing plans that nevertheless lost substantial proportions of their white populations, such as Chicago, Kansas City, and Baltimore (Meldrum and Eaton, 1994). Thus families' choices to move to the suburbs or send their children to private school were multivariate and are difficult to tease out in data.

Seattle's experience of a dip in white enrollment at the beginning of the controlled choice plan followed by a recovery is consistent with researchers' findings in some other cities (Carr and Zeigler, 1990). The results of one survey in Seattle suggest that the desegregation plans in this city have contributed to private school enrollment: In 1990, about 50 percent of parents of students in Seattle who had switched from public schools to private schools said that "child bused to a school not chosen" and "control regarding school attended" were very important reasons for leaving the public schools (Cresap, 1990). Two academic-related responses were slightly more popular: "support/help provided to child" and "academic education," but even these phrases might reflect concerns by white parents that students of color in their children's classrooms would harm academic quality. The ambiguity of this study and national findings make it impossible to confirm or deny the claim by anti-desegregationists in Seattle that a return to neighborhood schools will bring the middle class back to the public schools.

(5) Harms community cohesion - This last example of commonly-made arguments against desegregation stems largely from peoples' intuition. People across America, in cities, suburbs, and in rural areas, mourn the loss of a sense of community during the past few decades. What this means, exactly, depends on whom you talk to, but what is certain to everybody is that things just are not like they used to be. Among communities of color in cities, including Seattle, many blame busing for the changes. Nostalgia is rampant among African Americans in particular for black schools with black teachers, "which were good enough to get me where I am." The belief is that removing children from their neighborhoods during the day severs the link between school and community:

> Neighborhood schools are more than conveniently located schools. As a concept, neighborhood schools are an essential component of a community. The purpose, philosophy and persona of a community may be represented in a neighborhood school. ...When the values of the community are reflected in the school and its personnel, a reciprocal action often takes place. The values of the school are reflected in the community. This reciprocal relationship creates an atmosphere that supports and reinforces the learning environment of students of any age or ethnic group. (Grant, 1992)

This conception, whether from an academic like Grant or from a Seattle activist, is difficult to argue with because it draws on people's hopes and values. If we return to segregated schools, however, and hunker down in our segregated communities, will we be comfortable with the messages we thus communicate to our children?

Taken together, these five arguments against Seattle's controlled choice school integration plan have broad appeal. They draw on important ideals, peoples' sense of fairness, and peoples' fears about changes in our society. They generate a broad constituency about what to change *from*, but may leave people wondering about what to change *to*. The proposals that have been made at this early stage in the discussion in Seattle are described next.

Proposed Alternatives

A formal proposal has not yet been made, but both observers and school district insiders agree that the new policy is likely to have neighborhood preference, choice within coherent regional zones, and a funding formula that weights indicators of need (such as the number of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch, the number of students with single parents, and the number of special education students). The likely results of such a policy are greater racial segregation and wider variation among schools on test scores. It is uncertain whether students will improve academically as a result, but if the new policy simply redistributes students and resources among schools, but uses the same education practices, significant improvement seems unlikely.

Neither neighborhood schools nor resource redistribution are by themselves true education reforms that hold promise for significantly improving the preparation of students for citizenship and work. Neighborhood schools might facilitate parent participation in school-based activities, and they might strengthen community cohesion, both of which would be

laudable outcomes. Extra resources would permit schools with high proportions of poor students to hire more and better teachers and buy more learning materials and training, and this too would be a positive development; indeed it might be a necessary change from the standpoint of true equity. But neither of these changes is sufficient for quality schooling. Neighborhood schools are not inherently good schools, and adding money to a poorly functioning, unsuccessful organization like a school does not necessarily change the behavior of people in that organization.

Seattle is early in its process of reconfiguring its school desegregation policies. Perhaps before any policy changes actually take place, the conceptions of the policies that can replace mandatory busing will expand to include more ambitious plans for ensuring educational equity.

V. Why Now?

The Seattle case provides an example of a community in which the sentiment among political leaders shifted, over six years, from favoring policies to integrate school populations to being amenable to restoring neighborhood schools. Nationally, school districts that are being released from desegregation court orders are not passive recipients of these decisions; school district officials, under direction of the school board, must petition the court for the change in status. Largely these actions have been taken without negative political repercussions. The gradual scaling back of one of the most significant social policies of the latter twentieth century is being executed quietly and peacefully in contrast to the conflict endured while putting the policy in place.

This section explores the question of why this change is taking place *now* rather than later or previously. This question is particularly intriguing because widespread opposition to busing for integration is not new. This is demonstrated clearly in Seattle through the two anti-busing initiatives that were passed by Seattle voters in 1979 and 1989. Yet from the early seventies to the mid-nineties, the political forces necessary to prioritize desegregation over almost every other education policy prevailed over the anti-busing sentiments of a substantial proportion of the electorate, in Seattle and nationwide. What circumstances have shifted lately? This question is addressed first from a national perspective, then from a local perspective with some particular circumstances in Seattle that have facilitated the new policy direction.

National

A convergence in interrelated factors appears to be at play. Some of the most prominent are described in turn below:

Recent Supreme Court decisions - The most obvious response to the question "Why now?" is to blame the Supreme Court. The Court's more conservative make-up and recent decisions that facilitate ending desegregation court orders have had two effects. The first and most obvious is that school districts have been and will continue to be released from court supervision. The second effect is that cities like Seattle that never had a court order are

emboldened in their desegregation policy making to try less drastic measures, because they perceive the threat of a law suit to be less potent.

Since compulsion by jurists and threat of compulsion have largely responsible for most of the desegregation efforts in school districts, the Supreme Court's decisions have obviously been crucial in determining the timing of the rise of anti-desegregation on the policy agenda. One law professor, citing the recent decisions, sees the future this way:

> At one time over 500 school systems were operating under some form of school desegregation decree. With the termination of federal court supervision and the consequent dissolution of those decrees, large numbers of public school districts will regain plenary control over student school assignments. The goal of student assignments in those districts will no longer be motivated by the compelled need to maintain integrated student bodies. The foreseeable future for our nation's public schools is, therefore, one of increased racial and ethnic "separation." To state it bluntly, we have already seen the maximum amount of integrated public schools that we are likely to see in our lifetime. (Brown, 1995)

Although the recent decisions clearly facilitate resegregation, the Supreme Court is rarely on the vanguard of policy-making; in this instance as in others, the Court's decisions are consistent with other political factors such as those that follow.

Political mood - Another likely candidate for explaining the timing of the shift in desegregation politics is the overall political mood of the country. The 1994 Congressional elections revealed the growing appeal of conservatism. It will be difficult to assess the depth of this mood swing until the results of the 1996 elections are in, but even the democratic President has declared an end to the era of big government. Desegregation advocates can take solace in the fact that polling data now shows that most Americans share their desegregation objective. However, the mandatory busing policies that have been used as means to this end are now being portrayed as one of many big government interventions with high costs and uncertain benefits, along with Aid for Families with Dependent Children and affirmative action, among others.

In addition to the rise of conservatism, the decline of liberalism is another element of the current national political mood that has harmed the desegregation cause. The liberal wing of the Democratic party is quiet right now, perhaps in part because some of their banner social policies like busing have not succeeded in improving conditions in cities. The biracial

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coalitions that supported desegregation have lost the mayoralty in several cities, including New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, and are generally on the decline. Liberal desegregation activists interviewed for this paper, including civil rights lawyers, report a kind of battle fatigue on the issue; they have fought and won the desegregation battle repeatedly, but it is a bloody fight every time, and it keeps cropping up again. Since there is meager evidence that integration policies have succeeded in expanding educational opportunities for students of color, it has become increasingly difficult, even for desegregation's most passionate advocates to make a loud plea for the policy.

Disagreement within African American community - The fracture in opinion in the African American community has exacerbated this dilemma for the white portion of the biracial coalition. Until this decade, African American leaders were fairly consistent in their support for integration by whatever means necessary (even when the black populace expressed concerns and doubts). Galvanized by Martin Luther King's dream of a color-blind America, there was near consensus about the probity of the desegregation efforts. White liberals who supported the desegregation efforts did so with the assurance from the black community that integration was the highest priority for improving the education of African American children. This consistency began to falter in the eighties, with respectable voices from an array of disciplines like those of Derrick Bell, an African American law professor, Ronald Edmonds, an African American education researcher, and Howard Fuller, an educator, beginning to express doubts about the high priority that was placed on integration. By now the debate in the African American community is full blown, with even celebrities of the original *Brown* legal team backing away from integration in the face of implementation realities. For example, Federal Judge Robert Carter, who conceptualized the litigation and drafted the court documents for *Brown*, explained last year,

> There has been an ongoing debate in the black community...about strategy--whether blacks should push for integration or give up on integration and concentrate on securing quality education in predominantly black schools. Frankly, that debate has no relevance today. At least in the short run, a generation of black children is going to be educated in racially isolated schools in many of the urban centers of the country regardless of this debate, and so ways and means must be agreed on to help or force those schools to produce quality education. (Carter, 1995)

Unlike the white, probably racist voices of the past advocating for separate but equal schools, blacks have much more credibility when they claim to have the best interests of black children in mind (Holmes, 1995).

The split in the black community has contributed to the waning activism of white liberals. Anyone who takes a strong stand in favor of integration now can expect to receive criticism from respectable leaders of all races. The "right answer" is no longer clear. One observer attributes this white liberal uncertainty in the face of black ambivalence to an assuaging of the guilt that white America accumulated in the sixties. Following the assassination of President John Kennedy, Congress finally passed both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965; similarly, desegregation accelerated after the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy and the urban race riots: "As a nation we have always reacted to such significant events with behaviors based on guilt. Unfortunately, when the guilt wears off, so does the behavior." (Bates, 1990) Guilt, then, is not the most reliable source of impetus for policy.

Black political incorporation - One of the most common interview responses to the question of "why now?" was that since people of color, especially African Americans and Latinos, are now politically incorporated (hold positions of power, help to set the public agenda), there is no longer concern about returning to a "dual" system of schools. People of color increasingly trust their leaders to protect their resources and allocate them equitably to ensure that separate but equal is truly equal.

Time is up - It is possible that we are approaching the limit of the public's tolerance for waiting for benefits of desegregation to become apparent. After twenty-five years of earnestly trying to make the policy work (some would deny the earnestness of the effort), it has become more difficult for politicians to ask upset parents to "give it time." Public patience may also be strained because fewer voters and parents remember either the injustice of those government policies or the optimism of the civil rights era in which school integration policies were conceived. If there is such a limit to public patience with social policies, then it is probably

contributing to the rise in conservatism, but conservative politicians are also telling the public that it is time to give up. The relationship may be symbiotic.

Frustration with disproportionality - Although listed last, this may be one of the most important triggers of the change in sentiment about desegregation. Most Americans are and have been for some time extremely worried about the differences in achievement between whites and Asians versus blacks and Latinos. Although the test score gap has shrunk over the past few decades, it is still remarkably large and seemingly stubborn. This gap cannot be attributed only to our schools; indeed it may not be even primarily attributable to our schools. Nevertheless, it is clear to everyone that in some racially isolated schools and in some integrated schools, African American and Latino children are being relegated to an inferior education through tracking and resource inequities. It is argued that given these circumstances, we should stop spending our political and financial resources on moving students around in search of racial balance and start investing them in equalizing the quality of education everywhere.

Seattle

The timing of this latest round of desegregation discussions in Seattle is certainly related to all of the national factors just described, but there are some particular local conditions that also have played a role. An obvious one is the recent arrival of a new superintendent, John Stanford. Stanford has personal conviction about the need to change the student assignment plan, he lacks the previous superintendent's investment in the current controlled choice system, and he is riding on high political capital, for the moment. The new superintendent is also an African American, which may make his raising of the proposal for neighborhood schools more comfortable than for a white leader.

Another timing factor in Seattle is that in 1989 Mayor Rice and the previous Superintendent both said they would favor switching to an all-volunteer student assignment system within five years, so this is a previously condoned policy shift. Additionally, there are obvious flaws in the current system, the actual impact would be small, and Seattle has the

advantage of seeing other cities' experiences with changes in the direction of neighborhood schools; they do not have to be first.

The political environment is clearly ripe for change of desegregation policies in Seattle and nationwide. Given that Americans say they still support the ideal of integrated schools, it remains to be seen how significant the changes are and what types of policies are implemented in place of busing to ensure the Constitutional guarantee of equal educational opportunity.

VI. The Future of Equity in American Public Schools

Very little has been resolved in America's debate about desegregation. Policy analyses, political battles, and family decision-making have swirled around the issue for almost half a century, yet still Americans are not sure how to "do the right thing" on desegregation. As a demonstration of how little progress has been made by grappling with this issue for so long, this passage from an article written by Marian Wright Edelman twenty years ago describes circumstances that are strikingly similar to those discussed in this paper:

> The coalition of civil rights, labor, Jewish, and church groups, once able to march to the clarion morality of Martin Luther King's eloquence against egregious southern segregation, now falters before the nonredemptive rhetoric of Black disillusionment and frustration. Blacks are no longer as concerned with saving White souls. And in an economic crunch, when correcting prior and continuing discrimination against Blacks threatens other groups' jobs and perceived interests, White commitment to civil rights too often goes out the window. As a result, a new semantics of resistance has arisen. Busing, neighborhood schools, quality education, and quotas, terms bandied about by the Nixon administration, are couched in half-truths and a veneer of reasonableness. If left unchallenged, they will maintain the status quo in the 1970s just as effectively as did the explicit southern segregation laws in the 1950s and 1960s. (Edelman, 1975)

Edelman's concern that the status quo would be maintained was prophetic; as we saw from Orfield's study of racial isolation in Table 2, the proportion of African American public school students who attend majority-minority schools has been essentially stable since the early seventies.

In the latter half of the nineties, however, that stability appears to be deteriorating. A convergence of catalyzing factors presented in Section V is enabling the rhetoric of Nixon to resonate more loudly. Politicians from both parties, who for the past twenty-five years have mostly left race policies alone or discussed them only to facilitate their election campaigns, are recently willing to sponsor and vote for legislation to dismantle civil rights policies like busing and affirmative action. This policy shift is based on very real concerns about the harms and uncertain effectiveness of some integration policies. Ideas about what policies should take the place of busing for desegregation are poorly developed, but one theme comes through clearly: student achievement should be the paramount goal for public school districts.

This focus on student achievement may sound obvious, but it actually represents a fundamental priority shift relative to prominent practices for the past twenty-five years. Partly due to court and federal mandates and partly due to our faith in the power of civil rights, many school districts have been desegregating as a first step in policy making, then trying to maximize educational outcomes with whatever student and teacher configurations result and whatever resources remain. Many political, community, and school leaders were comfortable with this practice because they believed that desegregation measures, the most prominent of which is integration, would themselves have positive educational effects, especially for students of color.

Yet, mandatory busing for integration is a social policy based on constitutional rights, not an education policy derived from sound educational practice. This fact introduces substantial tensions for school board members who must implement the policies and parents who must subject their children to a bus ride past schools within walking distance from their home. Researchers and courts have tried to mold busing into an education policy by assessing its effects on test scores and other school outcomes, and have indeed found slightly positive achievement and attainment effects on average for students of color. But the small size of this effect, and the fact that it does not accrue for all desegregation plans means that as a society, if we are going to bus our students for integration, we are going to have to choose to do so for moral and constitutional reasons.

The constitutional reasons for busing are fading over time. The Supreme Court has made it clear in recent decisions that court orders for busing were never intended to exist "in perpetuity", that districts that no longer discriminate and that have desegregated students, teachers, facilities and materials "to the extent practicable" should regain their autonomy. Therefore, this reason for busing will necessarily fade over time.

What moral reasons can be invoked to justify integration? The "clarion morality" of which Edelman spoke is absent today, victim of the passage of time during which we discovered competing moral questions. Most Americans agree that our children should attend school with a representative cross-section of the community as a whole, but people are unsure

if it morally right to require this if students of one race bear more of the burden of the bus rides that make this possible. There is broad national consensus that all students should have the same educational opportunities, but not about whether it morally right to require students of color to attend schools with whites in them in order to obtain these opportunities. Is the moral probity of pursuing racially balanced school populations effaced if children are resegregated in classrooms as soon as they get to school? Balancing these issues of morality has always been difficult, but it appears that for some American communities, especially in cities, the scale has begun tipping away from mandatory busing.

Americans in general and Seattlites in particular, however, do not want to abandon *Brown*'s promise of equal educational opportunity; in fact, most critics of busing favor both voluntary measures to promote integrated schools and resource equalization (although supporting equalization in theory is quite different from supporting redistribution in practice). The prioritization of student achievement over integration is also construed as an equity assurance by the increasing numbers of people who seek equity of outcomes as the ultimate promise of *Brown*. These facts appear to leave room for compromises in communities that are reconsidering their desegregation policies.

The best policies will probably result if school districts consciously optimize integration, educational quality, and resource equity simultaneously. To pursue such a strategy successfully would require a comprehensive vision and a great deal of discipline from district leadership. Every policy proposal would be tested against all three principles, with policies that tackle more than one of the goals receiving preference. For example, if a district were serious about maximizing both resource equity *and* educational quality, it would not freely provide extra resources to a school that is failing academically; it would require the school the spend the extra funds on core academic programs as part of an overall plan for school improvement. Another example would be a fully developed magnet school program, in which extra resources are spent to create excellent academic programs that attract an integrated student body. Encouraging the best performing teachers and principals to work in the worst

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performing schools would also be consistent with this vision, since it would improve both academic quality and resource equality in the district.

These are just a few examples of policies that blend equity and educational objectives. Policy making with this type of framework would not work miracles in districts threatened with resegregation, but it might balance competing objectives more effectively.

As a society, we must be forthright about the likely consequences of any policy that resegregates our schools by race or socioeconomic class. At a recent symposium on desegregation in Olympia, Washington, the integration advocate and researcher Gary Orfield offered a daunting challenge: before assuming that separate schools can be equal, find a *system* of segregated schools that works. American public school systems have produced probably scores of individual schools that have provided a quality education to low income students. These examples of what became known as "effective schools" provide the basis for believing that we can do better. Yet despite the best intentions of thousands of educators across the country, no one has discovered how to manage an entire district of schools filled with low income students of color to produce excellent education for every student in every building.

In school districts that are considering options to their current mandatory busing programs, simply declaring a higher priority on academic achievement is unlikely to produce satisfactory results; we just have not figured out yet how to realize higher achievement for a system of low income schools. To honor the promise of *Brown*, therefore, over the long term, we must learn from the strengths and weaknesses of our past equity policies, and use these lessons to strive for policies that foster both academic success and interracial equity and harmony.

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